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**ALTERNATIVE ARTICULATIONS: A POST-
STRUCTURALIST READING OF A PROGRAMME TO
CHANGE NEW ZEALAND'S DRINKING CULTURE**

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Shannon Te Ahu Hanrahan
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Abstract

The field of alcohol regulation has been highly influenced by the *new public health* and its diverse attempts at influencing the conduct of individuals and populations to reduce alcohol-related harm. Dominated by objectivist and rationalist approaches, the new public health often fails to account for the critical role of knowledge, power and language in the construction of alcohol-related harm as an issue of governance. It is in response to the hegemony of the new public health approach, and the internal limit points of this discourse, that alternative understandings of the field of alcohol-regulation emerge.

This study conducts a post-structural reading of one of those alternative understandings, that of the Alcohol Advisory Council of New Zealand's (ALAC) programme of work known as the culture change programme. Employing the work of Michel Foucault, and in particular, his work on the art of government ("governmentality"), the thesis poses the question: how does ALAC negotiate the tension between those techniques and strategies that compel and coerce individuals and those regimes and frameworks of self-regulation that are calculated to guide individuals' behaviours?

ALAC's attempt to govern the field of alcohol-regulation through its relationships with external agencies is examined for answers. Using the post-structural discourse theory of Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe, this study examines ALAC's construction of the field of alcohol regulation, and its attempts to influence and engage external agencies in the culture change programme.

The findings indicate that ALAC's liberal conceptualisation of the social world does not account for the struggles over meaning that play out through its relationships with external agencies. The study suggests that if ALAC were to reconceptualise its view of the world as an 'open social system,' where meaning is relational,

contextual and historically located, a new set of tools becomes available for understanding the future prospects of the culture change programme.

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